

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9696

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 4319

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINT MORG CB

SUBJECT: CABINET RESHUFFLE

1. WHEN I SAW THE PRIME MINISTER TODAY, MARCH 10, HE THOUGHT HE WOULD COMPLETE THE CABINET RESHUFFLE IN THE COURSE OF THIS WEEK. THE NEW CABINET CONFIGURATION WILL BE LINKED TO THE CHANGE IN THE MILITARY COMMAND STRUCTURE. HE SAID THAT THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR, GENERAL EK PROEUNG, WILL PROBABLY BE DROPPED. LONG BORET DID NOT KNOW WHO WOULD REPLACE HIM. THE NEW CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ARMED FORCES WOULD SIMILTANEOUSLY HOLD THE POSITION OF MINISTER OF DEFENSE. FURTHERMORE, THE HONEST BUT UNLUCKY FORMER COMMANDER OF BATTAMBANG PROVINCE, GENERAL SAR HOR, WOULD PROBABLY BE INCLUDED IN THE CABINET. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THE NEW CABINET WILL BE MADE UP OF HONEST MEN, WILLING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT CORRUPTION AND WHO WILL TRY TO INSTILL A SENSE OF URGENCY, VIGOR AND AUSTERITY INTO THE GOVERNMENT. THE CABINET RESHUFFLE IS ALSO DESIGNED TO GIVE THE CIVILIAN POPULATION A FEELING OF HOPE, INSTEAD OF CONTINUING TO MUDDLE THROUGH WITH THE EXISTING TEAM, WHICH LONG BORET CLAIMS MOST CIVILIANS FEEL WOULD LEAD TO CERTAIN DEFEAT. THE PRIME MINISTER REITERATED THAT HE WOULD NOT RESIGN.

2. LONG BORET THEN ASKED ME ABOUT THE CHANCES FOR SUPPLEMENTAL AMERICAN ASSISTANCE FOR CAMBODIA. I OPINED THAT THE CONGRESS MAY NOT ACTUALLY VOTE FOR NEW
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ADDITIONAL FUNDS BUT WOULD HOPEFULLY APPROVE THE LIFTING

OF THE COUNTRY CEILING ON CAMBODIA AND INCREASE THE DRAW-DOWN AUTHORITY OF THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT, THEREBY PROVIDING ADDITIONAL MILITARY RESOURCES AND RICE FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR. I SAID THAT THIS KIND OF AN OUTCOME WOULD MAKE THE LEGISLATORS RESPONSIVE TO THE NEED FOR PROVIDING ADDITIONAL MILITARY AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES TO CAMBODIA, WITHOUT ACTUALLY HAVING TO VOTE NEW AND ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR THE KHMER REPUBLIC. LONG BORET UNDERSTOOD MY EXPLANATION. I STRESSED THAT NOTHING WAS CERTAIN UNTIL CONGRESS HAD ACTUALLY VOTED, BUT IF THIS SCENARIO WERE TO OCCUR, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE EXPLOITED LOCALLY TO HAVE THE DESIRED EFFECT ON KHMER MORALE.

3. LONG BORET SAID THAT HEAVY EMPHASIS IN FOREIGN PRESS ON EVACUATION OF FOREIGN NATIONALS FROM CAMBODIA HAS AN ADVERSE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT ON KHMERS. IT IS A VOTE OF "NON-CONFIDENCE" IN PHNOM PENH'S FUTURE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE EVACUATION OF MANY VIETNAMESE NATIONALS BY VIETNAMESE PLANES BROUGHT IN SPECIALLY FOR THIS PURPOSE LAST WEEK HAS SHAKEN KHMERS. I POINTED OUT THAT THE 200-MAN AMERICAN MISSION HAS REMAINED IN PLACE, AND WE HAD EVERY INTENTION TO HELP KHMERS GET THROUGH THIS PRESENT TIGHT SITUATION.

4. COMMENT: THE KHMER LEADERSHIP IS PUTTING MUCH FAITH IN THE REMOVAL OF SOME OLD FACES FROM POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND BRINGING BACK OTHERS WHO HAVE NOT BEEN AROUND LATELY. (EXAMPLE: SAK SUTSAKHAN.) WHETHER IT WILL WORK REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT I AGREE THAT THE RE-SHUFFLING AND RESTRUCTURING HAS INJECTED AT LEAST A GLIMMER OF HOPE, AND MAY REVERSE THE IMMOBILIZATION WHICH HAD SET IN. AS FOR THE HEAVY PLAY IN THE FOREIGN PRESS ON EVACUATION AND "MEANS OF EXTRACTING FOREIGNERS", I AGREED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THIS SAPS MORALE OF ALL THESE WHO WANT TO HELP THE KHMERS TO GET THROUGH THE DRY SEASON.
DEAN

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